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ABSTRACT

Brick Township (New Jersey) High School hosts special education programs for both high-school-aged and 4-year-old students. Two classes are offered for the trainable mentally retarded, one for the educable mentally retarded, two for the neurologically impaired, and two for the emotionally disturbed and socially maladjusted. A departmentalized, subject-oriented resource room program is provided for English, history, mathematics, and science. For the 4-year-olds, the school provides five sections for handicapped children and one for autistic children. The school also makes use of a neighboring vocational center for its special needs students in a former elementary school building. This report briefly describes each of these program elements, covering the character of the students enrolled, the utilization of certified and paraprofessional personnel, the coordination of each program element with the general comprehensive school program, the extent to which students are mainstreamed, the structure and organization of each program element, and the program success. Special problems associated with providing these programs are noted, but greater emphasis is placed on the special rewards to be obtained by offering them. (PGD)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

UTILIZING PL 94-142 STAFF IN THE GENERAL SCHOOL SETTING

A Presentation at the 70th Annual Convention of the NASSP, Orlando, Fla.

EA 018 317

Presented By:

Bart H. Brooks, Principal
Brick Township High School, NJ
February 15, 1986

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome. I hope that this session will in some way be very profitable to you.

Our topic is the utilization of PL 94-142 staff in the general school setting.

As most of you know, PL 94-142 is a law enacted by Congress in 1975, requiring the provision of education for handicapped, or special needs, children. The law applies to all fifty states, and is administered in varying ways, and to varying degrees, by each separate state.

Our session today will deal with the experiences of one school system in dealing with the impact of PL 94-142.

Brick Township is a suburban/rural school district located on the eastern coast of New Jersey in Ocean County. We are forty-five miles north of Atlantic City, sixty five miles south of New York City, and sixty miles due east of Philadelphia.

The township is a very old one, dating back to colonial times. It is named after an early settler, Samuel Brick, who operated a forge in the area.

Our district's earliest records indicate that an elementry school was in operation as far back as 1856. As late as 1956, the district operated only three elementary schools. And then two things happened:

A major superhighway, the Garden State Parkway opened in the mid 1950's. This made the shore area readily accessible

to all those seeking relief from the congested New York metropolitan area.

The second phenomenon, and one in which you all shared, was the post war baby boom.

The combination of these two events produced an ingress of gold rush proportions. During the early 1970's, Ocean County was the fastest growing county in America, with an annual growth rate in excess of 200%. The population of Brick Township went from 4,000 in 1956 to 60,000, in 1976. These figures do not include summer visitors, whose numbers usually triple the population during July and August. The growth rate was so great that for two years, 1972 and 1973, Brick Township imposed a moratorium on all new construction.

During the thirteen year period from 1958 to 1971, the Brick Township School System opened nine new schools and constructed a major high school addition.

During the 1970's enrollments were so heavy that most of the schools throughout Ocean County were on double sessions.

My school was on double sessions for nine years with enrollments in excess of 3400 students for many of them. The latest school built by our district was a second high school in 1980. This provided great relief for Brick Township High School, dropping our enrollment to 1700, and returning the school to single sessions. Presently our district operates two high schools,

two middle schools and seven elementary schools with a total enrollment of 9400.

Like most others, our twin booms peaked and subsided. Immigration to the township has slowed greatly and we are experiencing the same declining enrollments as most of you are in your districts.

Enter PL 94-142. As is the case with most federal legislation, it took a few years before we began to feel the effects of this new law. New Jersey had already had some experience with special needs education due to a law initiated by State Senator Alfred Beadleston in 1965. The Beadleston law, in fact, served as a model for many of the provisions contained in PL 94-142. One of the key provisions of the New Jersey regulations is the stipulation that special educational programs be offered in "the least restrictive environment". This means that, where possible, special education programs are to be offered in the regular school setting, and that as much as possible, special ed students are to be mainstreamed into regular classes.

As a result of our enrollment surge and decline, we at Brick found ourselves with space available as new special ed programs were formulated. We have also had a tradition of service to special students. Our educable class was first offered in 1962, and our trainable class opened in 1974. Further, the relationships between central office, school, administration, transportation, and health services have always

been excellent. We are committed to offering quality educational programs, and in the case of special students, we have amply demonstrated our willingness to "go that extra mile."

Our present special education program is varied and extensive. We offer two classes for trainable mentally retarded, one class for educable mentally retarded, two classes for neurologically impaired, two classes for emotionally disturbed/socially maladjusted. In addition, we offer a departmentalized subject-oriented resource room program for English, history, math, and science. This program is staffed with five teachers with certification in special education. We offer five sections for pre-school handicapped children, aged four. We offer a class for pre-school autistic children, also aged four.

In addition to these, we have a county vocational center located adjacent to our school site. Our students attend this center on a shared-time basis. Many of our special needs students attend the prevocational class there.

Over the last ten years we have had approximately 12-15 wheelchair students, some in need of special instruction, many capable of regular class placement. (This in a two story school with nine sets of stairs).

Finally, we operate an alternate school located in a former elementary school. This alternate school offers a program for what we call "disaffected students". These are not truly special needs students within the context of the law, but they are students who have achieved chronic failure in attitude, academics, and attendance.

Our high school staff consists of ten instructional departments, plus administration, and all of the usual support staff. Our special education department is the largest of the ten instructional departments. Not including the pre-vocational and alternate school staffs, the special education department consists of 17 teachers and 8 teacher aides, plus two full time speech therapists, one psychiatric social worker, and full time Child Study Team. A quick count gives us 24 certified professionals and 8 paraprofessionals in this department.

By comparison, our English department numbers 13!

Aside from its special education programs, Brick Township is a traditional comprehensive high school. We have a traditional eight period day. Each period is forty-five minutes long, including lunch periods. We offer a comprehensive curriculum - college prep, vocational, business, general, plus a basic skills remedial program. Our vocational program is shared time with the county school at four different sites. We bus students to our sister high school for AFJROTC. Because of the nature of our community, approximately 95% of our students are bused daily, although upper classmen are permitted to drive, if they choose. We are standardized, unionized, and computerized. Within this framework we have been able to operate a special needs program which we feel is unique, diverse, and humane.

I should like to take some time to review briefly each of the programs previously mentioned, since each is different and

presents its own set of problems and successes.

Our trainable program consists of two classes, level 3, and level 4. There are 23 students in the two classes with an age range of 13-22. The IQ range in the level 3 class is approximately 35-45, while the IQ in level 4 averages 50-60. Several of these students are physically disfigured, although all but one are ambulatory with full use of all limbs. Many have perceptual problems, notably in the speech and hearing areas.

They are taught by two teachers, assisted by three teacher aides. While our traditional school day is from 7:30 to 2:30, the school day for the trainable class is 10:15 to 4:00 P.M. Much of the instructional time is spent on speaking clearly, hearing correctly, performing simple manipulative skills and performing simple sequential tasks. Very little time is spent on teaching reading beyond recognition of identification and safety signs. Physical Education is offered three days per week, art and music one day per week.

One day a week the class takes a short trip to the community - a supermarket, a zoo, a bowling alley, or to the park or the beach. To pay for some of these activities the students recycle newspapers and aluminum cans. Vocational instruction includes simple office skills, such as collating, folding, stapling, and labeling bulk mailers. The students can operate a copy machine, ditto machine, and paper shredder. They prepare mailers, run off tests for other teachers, and dispose of old records for the district business office.

In addition, a home economics teacher spends a few hours a day with small groups. She teaches them cooking, safety procedures, simple recipes, table setting, and rudimentary social graces.

In the second half of this year we plan to add a unit on chambermaid/custodial skills. These are reasonably simple tasks that trainable students might master, and there is ample opportunity for employment in the community.

The second program that I would like to describe involves the EMR, NI, and PI classes. There are 45 students in four separate classes. These kids are of a higher ability level than the trainables. IQ's range from 60-80. In many respects they are quite normally developed. For the most part, they present an average physical appearance; muscle motor skills are normal; speech and communication skills are acceptable. Socially they are quite aware and constantly seek acceptance.

Because of this, and because we wish to offer the "least restrictive environment" we have grouped these classes as a team, or mini-department, if you will. The students follow the regular school day, all eight periods. They receive physical education three days a week; art and music one day each week. Many, although not all of these students, take part in the prevocational program. Many are mainstreamed into regular classes where they are capable, in areas such as physical education, sewing, cooking, typing, and woodshop.

The four teachers with primary responsibility work as a team and divide the academic areas among themselves. Unlike the trainable classes much time is spent on reading and math skills. In addition, these students receive instruction in personal hygiene, sex education, and driver training. We have made arrangements with the state department of motor vehicles to administer orally the written question part of the driver licensing examination.

These students receive regular computerized report cards and are eligible to participate in extra-curricular activities, which some of them do.

The next ability level in our program involves the students in the resource room or supplemental skills area. For some years, we assigned students to supplemental skills resource rooms for special coaching and remedial work. By state law a teacher could handle no more than five students per period, or a total of 25 per week. For many reasons this plan was not a success.

Two years ago we moved to what we call subject resource rooms, or departmentalized special program. Under this plan, students are mainstreamed where possible, assigned as many as four resource rooms for English, history, math and science, where indicated. Class size in this situation may be as large as twelve. A student may be in resource room for one subject, but attend regular classes in his other subjects where possible.

The students are happy. They follow a regular day schedule

with a chance for success without stigma. Many are in pre-vocational or regular vocational programs. The teachers are happy because they have a regular body of knowledge to teach and a class to receive it. The principal is happy because the teachers are teaching, the learners are learning, and the full-sized classrooms are being used for at least half sized classes.

There are five teachers and 105 students in this program.

The Brick Township School System like every other public school system in America finds itself from time to time blessed, or cursed, with troubled youths who cannot be contained within the normal classroom setting. These youths are identified, classified emotionally disturbed or socially maladjusted, and usually sent to special schools, often privately operated. These schools are of two types: residential where the student remains at the school full time; or day schools where the student commutes from his home each day. Both are extremely expensive.

It is frequently the case that these special schools, many operating with a proprietary motive, do not offer adequate programs for their young clients. Further, since these are problem youngsters to begin with, it is frequently the case that they choose not to go to school. The school system frequently finds itself in the position of paying for a taxi to transport a youngster to a tuition school he has no intention of attending.

Faced with this situation, the Brick Schools made a decison three years ago to revoke all out of district placements, except

residential. It was our feeling that if a youngster was not going to attend school, he could "not attend" our school a whole lot cheaper than he could "not attend" a tuition school. Secondly, it was our feeling that we had the resources to offer a far more substantial educational program than the proprietary schools could. The decision was primarily financial, secondarily educational.

These students come to school from 8:30 to 1:00 PM. There are twenty students in the class. There are two academic teachers, plus a psychiatric social worker to counsel the group daily. In addition, the students have a shop period, home economics period, and gym period daily. In this program, the students do not suffer from mental or physical retardation. They are full grown, intelligent if not literate, and perhaps too far advanced in social skills. All have a low frustration tolerance; most have severe home problems; many have problems with alcohol, drugs, or the police.

The first year of the program was tumuluous. There were many fights and flareups. We lost about 10 sets of glass doors as angry young men stormed out of the building. The language was atrocious, the demeanor outrageous. We levied out approximately 1,000 days of school suspensions. But we had made a decision. We were going to treat these kids pretty much as we treated the rest of the school. In effect, we said to them, "You are welcome, but we are in charge. If you can't live with that, you will leave."

And in fact, some did leave, but others stayed. The second year of the program was much better. There were still fights, flare ups, foul language, and suspensions, but they were less frequent, less violent.

In this, the third year of the program, the class can be described as "almost normal". Some of the students have been mainstreamed into typing, mechanical drawing, and computer classes. It is now possible to talk to them and get an answer that is printable. We feel that we have won the battle. We have increased their attendance. We have raised their self-esteem. We have offered hope and a way out. We offer a reasonable educational program. And we have saved the district $270,000 per year for the last three years.

One program that is unique to Brick High School, and most likely would be unique to any high school, is the pre-school handicapped program. Although required by law in New Jersey, such classes are usually held in elementary schools. This program involves children in the 4-5 age range who have been identified as special needs children.

The program is in its second year of operation and involves three teachers three aides, and approximately forty children in five class sections. The program is run very much like a two-session kindergarten program, with three two and one-half hour sessions in the morning and two in the afternoon.

Two full sized classrooms have been set aside and furnished exclusively for the use of the pre-school classes. One of these

classrooms is adjacent to a lavatory which is equipped for handicapped students and also contains small sized fixtures for the four year olds. To make this facility more available a door was cut in the classroom wall giving direct access.

The educational program for this group is similar to a regular kindergarten program. Much attention is paid to listening skills and following directions. The children learn colors, simple counting, projects with construction paper, expressions describing the weather. They also have art, music, birthday parties. There is a snack time, play time and rest time. There is also a full time speech therapist and two part time physical therapists. The program is full and happy and productive.

In addition to the pre-school handicapped youngsters, this year we are conducting an experimental class for pre-school, autistic children, aged four and five. The class is staffed by a teacher and two aides.

This class is run very much like the pre-school handicapped class except that it lasts for five hours and includes toilet training.

I mentioned earlier that over the years we have had a number of students in wheel chairs. In many ways these students present more difficulties than those in the programs already described. Our school plant is a large, rambling building that was constructed in three different stages on three different levels.

In scheduling a wheel chair student, it is necessary to deal with physical realities, and it is frequently necessary to relocate a whole class to accommodate one student.

In one particular case we arranged for the student to begin his day on the upper level. At lunch time, he was transported to the lower level by bus, and thus was able to finish the second half of his school day.

In addition to those programs mandated by PL-94-142, Brick Township High School also operates an alternate school program for students who have not been officially classified as special needs students, but very well could be. These students are poor achievers with academic, social, and other kinds of problems. They are potential drop-outs.

The alternate school accepts students who fit the above description from both of the district's high schools and both middle schools. Enrollment is limited to forty-five students at any given time. It is staffed by three teachers, an aide, a secretary, and a custodian. It is administered by an instructional supervisor who works at my direction.

Students who successfully complete the school year are returned to the regular high school program the following year as tenth graders.

By now, you are probably wondering what sort of problems such an extensive program presents, and how do we go about solving them? I shall answer the second part of the question first. We work at it. We have excellent communication and cooperation among all

parties involved. When a problem arises, we get together, determine the course of action, and follow through. We do our best to solve the problem with existing resources. If something more is needed, it is provided.

As to what sort of problems we face, there are many. Money is always a problem. Special education is expensive and money is a problem. However, since most of our programs are state-mandated, the money must be provided by the local district or the state. Our district receives approximately three million dollars per year in aid money for special needs.

Time is a problem. Special needs programs generate more meetings and conferences then any other segment of the school program.

Transportation is a problem. Our district operates approximately 90 school buses per day on eight different schedules. In the case of special needs, a special vehicle is frequently required - one with wheelchair fittings, or a hydraulic lift, or special restraints. Our special education buses are all radio equipped and staffed with a driver and an aide. Fortunately, we are blessed to have the services of an extremely capable transportation coordinator. This gentleman will spend twenty heated minutes forcibly explaining why your latest hare-brained request is totally impossible. Then he finds a way to do what you are asking.

Parent groups can be a problem in special education. They range all the way from those guilt ridden individuals who demand that the school produce the normal child that they could not, to the militant activist/advocates who can quote PL 94-142 from memory and hawkishly monitor the school's compliance.

Special schedules or variations in the school day present problems. On a normal day we have five separate dismissal times. When we have in-service or examinations on a shortened school day, it is necessary to check out each program individually.

Are there any rewards for administering such a diversified special needs operation with all of its attendant problems, laws, and regulations? Indeed there are, and they are many, some great and some small. There are rewards for parents, teachers, the Principal, special students and the other students.

Andy is 19 years old. He has been in our trainable class for two years. When it was time for Andy to attend our school, his parents had done nothing to prepare him. One day they told him they were going to take him out for a ride in the car. They dropped him at the school and left quickly. Andy spent his first day running up and down the hall screaming in absolute terror.

Last month, Andy shook my hand, wished me a Merry Christmas and presented me with a wooden "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer" which he had cut out on a jigsaw and assembled by himself.

Danielle suffers from many of the problems associated with severe retardation. Her physical features are distorted. She has speech, vision, and hearing problems. It took almost a year to get Danielle to greet people in the corridors. One night the phone rang at her home and she told her mother it was Mr. Brooks calling to see how she was.

Paul is an 18 year old young man, physically normal and a good deal brighter than most. Unfortunately, his home support was not strong, and by the age of 15, Paul had serious problems with drugs and alcohol. After a stay in a rehabilitation center, Paul joined our emotionally disturbed program. His school progress was so good that he was able to take advanced computer courses. Before he graduated last June, we used Paul on a few occasions as a peer counselor for other students struggling with the problems he had conquered.

Robert and Sharon are also members of the emotionally disturbed class. Both will graduate this June. Sharon is considering the armed services, Robert wants to become a magician. At Christmas, Robert and Sharon put on a magic show for the trainable class. While Robert competently performed several sleight of hand tricks, Sharon poured punch and distributed chocolate kisses to an impressed audience of students, teachers, and parents.

There are rewards for special needs teachers also. In addition to seeing their hard work bear fruit as pupil performance or comprehension increases, they enjoy a special position among their colleagues on the teaching staff. Almost every day, an English or math or shop teacher will tell me, "Boy, I don't know how they do it. I take my hat off to them." This awed recognition translates into genuine respect, as the special ed teachers are recognized as faculty leaders whose opinions and judgments are eagerly sought.

There are rewards for the principal, too. As I have already said, we haven't lost a set of glass doors all year. Another big plus for the principal is the special ed staff. They do work harder than other staff. They are super human beings.

Perhaps the greatest reward for the principal lies in knowing that the special ed program is indeed something special, and that he has a large part in making it work. It's a good feeling.

While the parents, teachers, principal and kids involved in special ed all receive some special rewards, it is my feeling that those who benefit most are the regular students in the rest of the student body. Students frequently complain that schools don't teach enough about life in the real world. By mixing special needs students into the regular student body, the school is presenting some very, very hard facts of life - realities that people must face with their own children, or family, or friends.

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And the lesson is not lost on our students. Our kids have been unbelievable, just super. So great is their acceptance and respect for their less fortunate class mates that our Middle Atlantic States Visiting Committee, in 1982, issued a special commendation to the student body for its treatment of the special ed student.

Throughout its history, Brick Township High School has had more than its share of athletic success. Our teams have been perennial champions in football and ice hockey, two competitions that do not exactly spring from the land of the quiche-eaters. And yet, I can tell you that the way to the heart of a 200 pound linebacker is to ask him to help a little guy with his walker, or to use his bulging muscles to lift a wheelchair up the stairs.

Last year we had a little girl named Joyce. Joyce was severly retarded. Each day her group would leave its classroom, go to lunch, and then return. But a funny thing happened on the way from the cafeteria. To return from lunch,Joyce's group had to pass by one of the biology rooms. These are wondrous places, filled with skulls and skeletons, pictures and models, plants and fish tanks, all sorts of exciting things. Naturally, Joyce wanted to be a part of all this. As a result she would frequently join the class, sitting right in the middle of the center row of seats.

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One day when this happened I got a call. Would I please come and get Joyce and take her back to her own class?

When I arrived at the biology room, the teacher was teaching, the students were listening, watching, taking notes. And Joyce was beaming! Before the class was over, I was mightily impressed with two things. One was my total inability to convince Joyce to move. What a foolish, helpless feeling!

The other thing that impressed me was the way a group of ninth and tenth graders reacted to the situation. Not only did they treat Joyce with care and good humor, they were even nice to me in my public moment of total incompetence.

Then there was Mark. Mark was with us for a number of years. He, too, was severly retarded. He also lived about a block from the school and was a frequent visitor to all activities at the school. One evening last spring we held our annual induction ceremony for the National Honor Society. As is our tradition, we held a ceremony in the auditorium, followed by a very nice buffet dinner in the cafeteria.

While the ceremony was going on, Mark made his way to the cafeteria and was most helpful to the cafeteria ladies - setting up tables, moving things, carrying salad bowls, and the like. As a reward for his efforts, the ladies gave Mark a bountiful plate of buffet goodies.

At about that time, the ceremony ended and everyone headed for the cafeteria. I and the other administrators

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present joined Mark at his table. So while the new members of the National Honor Society had dinner with only their parents, Mark dined with the principal, two assistant principals, the director of guidance and the sponsor of the NHS.

The National Honor Society is still pondering the implications of that seating arrangement.

Each of the preceding anecdotes details the outstanding conduct of a small or select group of students in a controlled situation. I would like to relate to you now an event which, to my mind, best illustrates the genuine respect and compassion which our entire student body demonstrates for their less fortunate school mates.

The gifted young man who teaches our trainable class firmly believes that his charges must learn to make their own way. To this end, he devises all sorts of activities which are routinely performed in the real world.

In one such activity, he sends one or two students, with money, to the cafeteria at the other end of the building. There they purchase a specified number of containers of milk and juice, pay for them, put them on a tray (along with the change) and bring them back to the classroom. At passing time between classes!

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like you to know that my high school days were spent in a private, religious, somewhat elite, all boys prep school. If anyone were ever to attempt

such an activity in that school, he would lose the milk, lose the juice, lose the change, and, more than likely, lose the tray, too.

And yet in our high school this eventhappens daily. Not once in the last five years has anyone taken advantage of these students.

During the last several minutes you have been kind enough to listen while I described for you a very diversified and extensive special needs program which takes place daily within the confines of a traditional, comprehensive high school. I have dwelt briefly on some of the problems such a program presents, but I have deliberately minimized these to spend more time on some of the successes.

In many places special needs children are still treated like an unwanted relative - isolated in a substandard classroom, relegated to some tin can trailer that the district happened to have available, or even consigned to special schools and centers so that their problems will not be visited upon others.

I submit to you that our experiences at Brick Township High School demonstrate that there is a place for everyone in the regular school setting. Those who do not believe this do a disservice, not only to their special needs students, but also to their regular placement students.

Our topic for today was "Utilizing PL 94-142 Staff in the General School Setting." I hope that I have had some success in

convincing you that a better title might be, "Special Ed - It's Good for Everybody."

Thank you.